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VIA DOLOROSA,
OR,
THE HALF-SIN
OF LADY MARGARET.





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DOBELL COLLECTION

VIA DOLOROSA,
AND OTHER POEMS.



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OR,

THE HEIRESS AT ALTON GRANGE'S SORROW.

AND OTHER POEMS.

By M.

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London:

PROVOST & Co. (SUCCESSORS TO A. W. BENNETT),
5, BISHOPSGATE WITHOUT.

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Joseph Maggini Wheeler.



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INTRODUCTION TO VIA DOLOROSA.



THIS Tale in Verse was partly suggested by two facts. The one became revealed on the death-bed of a beautiful, good, rich, and clever daughter of "Merrie Englande!" The other was an inscription on a Russian grave-stone, relating also to an English Lady. The names have of course been changed.







VIA DOLOROSA,

Ec., Ec.



T SEE her still with those sweet, restless lips,—
Lips fragrant with the breath of rosy youth,—
Whose fervid crimson mantled like the bloom
Of a ripe peach, deep stained in purple dye,
I think I see her still, all life and fire,
And youth and love, a passion-breathing form !
I see her yet with white and gleaming arms,
Nervous, tho' frail, and soft with prettiest down ;
Nor wild, nor tamed,—ineffable and strange,—
A perfect creature, shadowing forth a woman !

She had a play-mate whom she dearly loved,
(As children love), oft quarrelled with, and oft
Rewarded with a kiss. They had no thought
Of serious import. Time passed onward, they
Were children still. *He* went abroad, and there—
Scarce recking what he did—bewildered, flattered,
Not knowing his own heart, but pleased, triumphant
At his scarce-coveted success, he married.
Married a stranger's daughter fair and cold,
The fairest of fair England's children; but
Alas, with heart so selfish, vain and false,
That England scarce would own her for her child.

There was loud mirth and feasting at the Grange,
And tenderest mother's hearth-love schemes,
To welcome fitly bride and bridegroom back;
And lady Margaret, now almost a woman,
Was first and fondest in her gentle greeting;
Margaret, the orphaned heiress, rich in gold,

But, ah ! how lone. Her titled brothers dead,
A line extinct, the trappings gone to strangers,
She stood, with wealth about her, but alone,
Save those kind warders of her youth, whom now
New ties and cares she knew must soon
Detach from her. With fondest, gentlest greeting,
With warmth of childhood past, again they met.
They met ! How is it that we often meet,
And feel no thrill, and have no mutual sign,
To stir the clear repose that lulls our soul,
Till comes *one* day !—Oh, let us pause awhile ;
Recall each word, each thought, each glance, each thrill
That hallowed it with their own gleams of love.
Was it far down the beautiful English land ?
Your horses long had strayed from all the rest,
A thorn had pierced *her* foot,—set on the grass,
You cut and stripped her little boot. That day
Your eyes met as they ne'er had met before,
And then the lips—your fate was sealed that day !
Was it away upon the Indian seas,
The perfumed, vaporous, violet seas of Ind,

Amid the lilac twilight of the East ;
You raised your glance from off the throbbing wave ?
Half-turned eyes met ; you pressed your lips
To the white arm that rested on the taffrail ;
She left her arm to your impassioned kisses.
Francesca, was't when reading in a book
Your eyes fell on his lips ? You read no more that day.*
Say, was it, seated at the sumptuous feast,
Where gem-carved plate and frosted crystal
Bedeck the board of the pale Indian exile ;
'Mid perfumes of the broad-leaved tropic flowers,
And fanned by passionate breezes of the South ;
Each felt that each was gazing on the other,
With steady eyes and half-averted head ?
In handing her her scarf that night, you kissed
The hem that soon must rest upon her neck ;
And then, alas, Ah ! then your eyes did meet !—
Or was it in the garish capital,
The hot wild season at its height, the hearth

* Francesca di Rimini. See "Dante's Inferno."

Heaped up with flowers ? or was it later,
The autumn embers in the massive grate,
Embroidery half-finished on the table,
With half-read, open, yellow books ?—ah ! yes,
Remember even their colour !—In the street
Went the low murmur of a passing chariot,—
Your eyes did meet ! All else seemed most unmeaning ;
The busy hum upon the sounding pavement,
The stupid voices of the hurrying crowd !
Only for you two seemed the world to stop,
The sun to go back, as that shiver came,
With which your hearts triumphant leapt to life !

II.

They met ! A something thrilled them as they met ;
A sudden flash, yet of what awful portent !
Nervously mingling in the general flow
Of courtesy and converse, as they stood
Scanning the leaves of some new published album,
Or falsely busy with some meaner thing.

Oh, how that steel slow entered to their hearts !
And thoughts, yielded by childhood's love, revived
Triumphant, never to be smothered more.
Day followed fast on day, 'neath the same roof,
In sweet companionship of equal tastes
And like pursuits. Slowly and wearily
Her heart did sicken with a pallid love,
Hidden yet burning, a lamp within a tomb !
" I will not covet what another's is ;
I will not wrong thee, fair one, he's thy husband.
I never can do this, and yet—who knows ?—
Perhaps in time, recalling our young years,
He too, would feel what I alas must suffer.
Did not his loving eyes, dear eyes, (these words
Were scarcely whispered to her heart), look long
And fondly into mine the other night ?
Did not his arm press mine ? Oh ! base, base thoughts !
What demon is't that haunts me ? Am I not
A Christian maid, a white-souled English girl,
That I do pause to con and ponder o'er
Thoughts that would make a felon blush. I, I

Covet another's husband ; I, who oft
Have kissed the rose and called her cousin,
Whose soul sistered itself with lilies ; I,
Who laughed to hear them say the snow was pure !
Ah, me ! Alas, how is it with me now !”

They both were seated in an old dim hall,
Her eyes fixed vacant on the Persian loom
That tapestried a floor (unseen by her) ;
His, from her booted feet, ne'er seemed to rise.
The winter fire blazed round, the massive logs
Shed mysteries of warmth to where they sate ;
And, as if searching in their inmost thoughts,
Seemed a third being, watching to be kind,
And asking of each half-suffused cheek,
What woe hung on them, why they spoke not ?
She had not sought this meeting, nay had striven
To 'scape it. For our Margaret, being an orphan,
Having much wealth, and also loving friends
Or even kindred at most foreign courts,

And being her own mistress, had resolved
To tear herself away, to travel, and
To hide her grief at least from those she knew.
But all in vain, some time must still elapse
E'er all was ordered for her flight, and so
To cloak precipitancy, that quick tongues
And busy gossip might not tell the cause
Of her departure. She could not have fled
The Hall just then without much rudeness and
Betraying her confusion, and the feeling,
The dreaded feeling she would hide. Nay Gore,
(Who, with his young and plotting wife,
That morning had agreed that he should speak
To Margaret, and win her o'er to brook
Their company on her travels—for they feared
Her youth and orphanage might need protection),
Gore did rear his shoulders 'gainst the door,
And straight declared he would not stir until
Margaret had heard him, and given reason
Why he and Edith should not go with her.
All unsuspecting, Gore did little seek

The tear-stained interview which now he forced.

"Margaret, sweet Margaret," he said, "stay with us,
Why leave us?—

—Nay then, if you *must* go, say
Why not my wife and I go with you, dearest.
Have I not always loved you, Maggie, mine?
My Edith loves you too—I know she dreads
To see you sad—then let us go with you."
She never raised her eyes from out the gloom
Of vacancy, that seemed to weigh them down;
But a deep, and to him, incomprehensible blush
Mantled o'er all her face, and full white neck,
And in low, soft, vibrating tones she said:
"Nay, I *must* go alone."—

—He took her hand:
"Oh, Maggie, by that childish love that now
Has passed with growing years,—our childish love,
At least *my* love—for truth to say it was
All on my side—think of the dangers that
May press on you—you turn away? Nay, I
Can be most obstinate too, I *will* speak; 'tis

Scarce well to treat us so ; come, look at me.
Nay, I *will* see your face, even if't be cross.
Come !—How ! In tears !—Great Heaven, Margaret,
My sweetest, darling girl !"—

—He drew her head

Upon his heart, and placed his hand upon
Her glossy hair ; while she, convulsed and struggling,
Could neither flee, nor speak one word. Alarmed,
Gore chafed her hands, and calling on her name,
Kissed her fair forehead, cheeks and lips, until
Looking down on her beauty and seeing how fair,
How very fair a thing she was, he started
From the impropriety of his haste. Soon Margaret
Looked back, and shivering as with a power
Electric, strange, of rapture, pain or woe :
“ Enough, enough,” she said, “ This must not be ;”
Then, bending once again her head to earth,
Her whole frame shook with agonising sobs.
Oh ! who can blame that he with sudden light,
Piercing the secret canker of her heart,
And feeling all his former beautiful love

Ten thousand-fold increased at sight of grief;
 Oh! who can blame him, that he wound his arms
 Around her suffering, palpitating form;
 And thus entwined, straining her to his heart,
 Thinking no ill, strove but to soothe her sorrow.
 "Now go, we *must* part, this is madness, wrong."
 "Nay, my sweet girl, I know it were not wise
 If we were not to part—for ever may be.
 For now I may not strive to stay you, Margaret,
 Nor seek to journey with you, dearest."
 "Nay, nay, we must, *must* part. Yes, this will be,
 And my heart break!—Oh! is it thus? Why, why
 Doth hard fate sever us who are its thralls,
 Who've found the very first bloom of our hearts,
 Long, long years yearn'd for, each in th'other's breast?
 Who could have been so perfect, dwelling together,
 Twin-made for tenderest familiarity.
 Who could have lived as one—aye in a desert!
 Aye in the desert, Gore;—the dim, wide desert!"
 These words were scarcely breathed; her eyes were
 fixed

Frankly on his—

—“The desert ; aye, or ev’n a dungeon!”
Each looked into the other’s eyes. Oh, that long gaze!
They saw the smouldering embers of their souls,
The gloom’d, undying splendour of their love,
That burn’d with hot, pulsating rays, wherein
Heart answered bursting heart and aching breast.
Now, all revealed, their passion there was throned,
Regal and true, with steadfast yearning faith,
Strong thro’ all sorrow, powerful unto death ;
But ever th’wart its warm refulgence moved
The sombre, veiled shadow of a sin.

“ Oh! dear, dear Friend, farewell,”—

—“ Heaven, *must* it be ?”

“ Farewell, farewell, but ”. . . .

Margaret struggled hard
With him and with herself, but one long kiss
He left upon her lips. Rapt kiss that burned,
Penetrating, bitter, searing all her heart,

To leave it faint and bleeding evermore !
“ Margaret, I will be free, you shall be mine !
Oh, can I leave you Margaret, can you me ?
May we not wander to some distant place,
Until our very names are both forgotten ?
Do we not love, and with that word do not
All formal world restrictions seem contemptible
And void, and only fit for what we *were*,
Not what we plainly now feel we two are ?
For all is clear as day between us now,
Is it not, Darling ? Yes, I will, *will* kiss
Your dear lips—Oh, you do feel I am right,
For Heaven itself hath made us for each other,
And joined us ; can we doubt it ?
That wife, so changeable and vain, I will
Divorce her from my heart and board. She'll care not.
She never loved, she changes with the week !
I shall be blamed, what matter. We'll come back
When all's forgotten, to some English village
Embowered deep in flowers among the hills,
Or on some Southland down. We'll let the world

Pass by us. Tenderest household cares, our flowers,
Our books, our rides amid the tangled woods,
Our wanderings at eve, round our still home,
Will make us soon forget!—Rising at morn,
Seated together at the self-same board,
And serving each the other from our hands;
No menials by, to bring cold memory back. . . .
Margaret, we must—is it not so?—*must* live together!”
“Oh Gore, oh, dear dear Gore, my aching heart!”
The woman almost fainted; he did press
A cup of water to her delicate lips,
And, when he saw her tears fall mingling in it,
“Oh, let me drink of that,” he cried, “with you!
Delicious, salt, salt tears—yet silver sweet!”
They spoke not *now*: their cheeks were drawing close,
Their breathing each the other heard,
And almost *felt*, warm tremulous from their lips.
Their hair did thrill electric, as it touched;
Their eyes, although downcast, gazed out afar,
Far, far away, and into vacancy.
One arm unconsciously around her waist

Remained. The twilight all unheeded came,
And shrank in solemn shadows round the room ;
And ever and anon the sobbing wind
Made saddest moaning in the far-off trees ;
And ever and anon their parched lips met,
(Imperious tyrants for thus much of sin),
Met and were pressed, and grew together, and
Drank long, deep draughts of love, till they waxed
faint,

Like full blush roses withered in the sun.
Sad welling tears came mingling o'er their cheeks,
Their whole frames thrilled with hushed but eloquent
sobs,

And bliss almost too poignant, pure and deep
Was theirs—who wept together in their love.
But ever and anon around them moved
The sombre, veiled shadow of a sin.

* * * * *

The morning dawn'd, and Margaret was gone !

III.

Margaret was pure from crime ; but, oh, how crushed !
The power to hope lay palsied in her heart ;
Like to the Ruby-moth, when roughly handled,
Or sensitive petals shrinking in the wind,
Herself awed into terror, at her own resolve !

An old man, long her father's henchman, skilled
In travellers' ways, with his half-witted daughter,
A fair-haired child and Margaret's foster sister,
These two went with her in her wanderings.

O'er hills, in distant lands, they took their way,
And where a longing prompted, there did pause ;
Sometimes in cities, oftener near the woods,
And by the banks of grand historic waters ;
But wheresoe'er they tarried, Margaret walked
Alone, and never smiled and seldom spoke.

The old man oft was anxious and distressed,
So far, so long, from morn to eve she strayed.

And now new sorrows fell on Margaret ;
A pale and loathly sickness dried her substance ;
Her skin, that had been fair, and soft, and white,
By sorrow grew incurably corrupt ;
Her beauty faded, her long locks were thinned,
Her cheeks and eyes fell hollow day by day ;
Thou foul Fiend Grief, oh, what a wreck thou mad'st.

All hope of joy has left her ; Margaret mourns—
Mourns alway, secretly, to nature's ear.
See where she rests beside yon well-known lake,
That ever round its sombre reeds makes moan
In sullen current ; where the lotus flowers,
Whitely embedded in their dark, still depths,
Turn their pale bosoms to the veiled moon—
True buds of solitude and midnight drear.
Margaret is seated by the waters dark,
Her head bent low upon her trembling knees,

And clasped between her spirit-like hands that tell,
In spasmodic twitchings, her deep agony !
“Will this my constant heart-ache never cease ?
Oh, kindest Heaven, will this never end ?
Men say, ‘ be patient ; ’ Lord, oh did’st not Thou
Sweat blood, and cry out in Thine agony ?
Then how can I, weak thing, bear up against
My sorrow ? I will strive to hide it, but
I fear I cannot, no can *not* be patient.
Have any ever understood thee, Lord ?
Men try to rid us of our grief by words.
Full well I know that I deserve all pain ;
But oh, kind Lord, how can I bear this, this.
Oh when, alas ! when will this sorrow cease ? ”

Poor child come in, return to the warm house,*
Come in out of the blasts and chilly darkness.
See thy poor hands are shrivelled, numb and dead,
These cold stones hurt thy feet, thy cloak has fallen,

* In this passage I think that I am somewhat indebted to America's great Poet, Longfellow.

Thy slender frame has scarce a covering,
Thy fixed eyeballs stare, thou movest not ;
Dost thou not *feel* the horrors of the place ?
“ Ah, Heaven, send me some short respite soon ! ”
She never rose nor stirred the live-long night,
But lay, struck down by grief, on the cold ground ;
The night birds passed, and screamed above her head ;
The cold wind lulled her to a sort of sleep ;
But only when exhaustion hid her grief,
She ceased to cry, “ Ah, me ! ah, Woe is me ! ”

Such nights of torture Margaret often passed,
Yet dreaded the return of light. It brought
New glaring contrasts to her inward grief ;
The sight of happy faces, and the mirth—
The mirth of joyous day—made her most sad.

Once a fair planet shone above the lake,
And seemed to fill the sky with beauty ; she
Felt only the more lone and melancholy,
And, sadly smiling through her tears, did cry :
“ Fair light, thy virgin cheek, pure and unsullied,

Fears not the rising day ; his brightest beam
Spreads new mysterious beauty o'er thy brow ;
When, as thou dost resign thy sweet charge night,
He prints a kiss upon thee ! Thy last ray
Is still the sweetest, ever, as it dies !
But I, I dread to wake from sleep, to feel
All my live woes, (which were a moment drowned
In short forgetfulness), come back to me ;
God pardon me, I hate the light of day !”

Oft, crouched in night she felt so cow'd and bent,
So burthened down with sorrow, past the strength
Of her poor bleeding heart to bear ; that then
She saw (in mind) a second Self approach,
That seemed alone, of all the wide, wide world,
To pity the lone wretched thing she was,
And self to self cried : “ Poor, poor Margaret !”

They passed to other lands, where the tall pine,
The Russian birch-tree, and wide-spreading steppes
In long monotonous succession, filled

The space between th' unfrequent towns and hamlets.
She strove to reach far Petersburg, (a friend,
One whom she dearly loved, dwelt there).

She sought to fly herself, but consolation
Or e'en forgetfulness she never found.
Or in her "landau" restless, moving ever,
She paused not save to rest or please her people ;
And, when at times they halted, she would stray
Far o'er the hills amid the sleet and snow.
Her small feet scarcely felt the freezing cold ;
She covered not her hands, tho' numbed and dead.
The Russian wind did revel with her hair,
And froze the tears that wellèd o'er her cheeks.
She heeded naught. Deep melancholy thoughts
And woes, immortal as the winds themselves,
Alone did occupy her tortured soul.
Remembering the words of an old song, she wept.
It told how just such dark and hurrying clouds,
And e'en such lonely woods, whose every leaf
Fell flickering to the ground, to shroud

Its mother Earth ; how such dejected scene
Did lure a maiden to a self-wrought grave !
The old familiar words of the sad strain
Did fall like tears upon poor Margaret's heart.
She wept ! A demon, beautiful as the night,
Moonless, when only melancholy stars,
In mystic, soft, vibrating lustre, throb
Upon the brow of Eastern climes. An angel
Stood close, or seemed to stand, beside her there ;
Peace offerings in one hand ; sleep, rest, forgetfulness.
In the other—(see that suicidal hand
Of old, known thro' all ages, since the heart,
The human heart, grief-hunted-down, hath bled)—
Something, which he concealed within his breast.
He, whom her youth had often shuddered at,
Tho' then so far, far from her, only haunting
Others, *He* had come—great Heaven !—to her at last.

She wept, nor fear nor terror struck her now.
The dread companion which adversity
Had thrust into her thoughts did seem a master

Whose will was her's ; and as she yielded, Lo !
 His brow, with beauty calm and mild was ray'd.
 He looked into her eyes with yearning gaze,
 And seemed a friend with old familiar face,
 Trembling, uncertain of a welcome from her.
 She wept, alas ! she wished to die and rest,
 But wrenching all her heart from out the gulf
 Of fell despair that yawned around, she cried :
 "Jesu, I will write Thy name upon my heart !
 Oh save me, Heaven, save me from *that* crime."
 Then Margaret did a strange, unusual thing,
 A thing would make the happy smile ; the wise
 And grave to pity her wild grief-distraction.
 Margaret did bare her now emaciate breast,
 And, tho' disease had made her thin and weak,
 It still was beautiful. She straight unclasped
 A brooch of diamond and ruby from her neck,
 And with the sharp gold pin, cut the first letter
 Of the Great Sufferer's name, and then a cross,
 And under it *another* letter.* 'Twas rudely done,

* A fact, though strange.

For, tho' she did it not for that, the pain
Made her hand tremble, and 'twas numbed with cold.
Poor little hesitating hand! 'twas numbed with cold!

Full many a day doth pass, but Margaret's tears
And anguish know no respite. Sorrowing still
Altho' herself so good, and loving so
The Master of all goodness—sorrowing ever.
Her beauty withered, cankered, dried, and past
Beyond all hopes renewing, sorrowing always,
She fain must pause at last, in a lone village
Hard by the wayside. There she lays her down,
And for long days a Russian priest, his wife,
And gentle loving children, wait on her.
She dieth—no consolation comes; no joy
To that one hidden sorrow in her heart?
Is life all dark to her unto the end?

'He chastens whom He loves.' Will He vouchsafe
To take her bitter cup from her? The very blood
That gurgles from her lips, strikes not such horror,

Into her soul, as doth the long continuance
Of never-ending grief. She welcomes death.
Time might have lessened sorrow ; time, alas,
Is lent not—Consolation cannot come.

Oh ! was it so ? Shone not a sudden light
Within those hollow, tearful eyes at last ?
Did she not see a face we cannot see ?
Did she not hear a voice we cannot hear ?
Enclasp a hand which here we may not press ?
That Form, that wanders footsore thro' the world,
Knocks at our portals when the house is death-struck—
At morn, in the broad sun, or still midnight—
And, gently lifting the oft-noted latch,
Beaming with beauty, clasps the dying frame ;
And promising that all its loves shall follow,
Child, parent, friend, and that one secret love,
(For who could bear to cast these from their hearts ?)
Bestows what eye or ear have never known.

Oh yes ; and ere she passed away from earth,

A hurried step, a sharp, quick, stifled cry,
A passionate yearning wail broke on her ear :—
“ He comes ; I *knew* he'd come ! *She* could not keep
him

Away from me, my loving faithful one !
Oh yes ; come to me now. Heaven owes me this.
Oh, Heaven is good. Come quick, my only love !
My aching heart could never sink to rest
Save in your arms. My own—not hers—my own,
My husband !” Gore did burst into the room.
She, tho' bed-ridden, with unwonted strength
Sat up, with head advanced and outstretched arms ;
He almost sprung to her embrace. With rapid,
Quick, devouring kisses on her cheeks,
And lips, and eyes, and neck, with tears and sobs,
And smiles, nay almost laughter, did their souls
Grow one. He clung to her ; she strained with strong
Convulsive clasp his throbbing neck, within
Her now emaciate but still beautiful arms.
She felt his warm and kindest loving lips
Striving to breathe new life into her frame.

He drank the moisture from her dewy neck,
And smoothed her tresses with a mother's hand.
And in his warm, secure, and true embrace,
Her heart swelled up to bursting in its bliss.

The gentle Russian priest did marry them ;
He knew not that Gore's wife had left him then,
But deemed no marriage valid save *his* church's'.
Gore scarcely left her all the live-long day ;
And when the night came rolling up the East,
He lay his head upon the pillow close,
Close by her cheek. Their lips scarce ever parted.
His booted limbs were stretched along by hers,
And nestled close their hearts did beat as one.
The night came onward, and uprose the winds,
And sighed their anthems wild from out the West.
She ever loved the winds, their soothing breath
Had often brought repose to her hot brow.
And Gore could never hear without a thrill,
Their grand, old, gentle voice, that seems the call
To some weird, dim, unfathomed future bliss,

Heard for a moment here, to cheer and save
Poor hearts that else would break.

“ Oh darling, still,
Still dost thou love me ; am I not all changed ?
My poor, kind husband ? ”

Gore could scarcely speak.
He strained her to him with a passionate love,
That raised her drooping soul to rapture—
“ My own, my own, my loved, my darling wife ! ”
Long time they lay, recalling their first meetings,
Their first touch of the hand, their first side glance,
First ride together, and their first embrace.
She almost smiled again,—

“ I cannot speak,
I am too happy. ”—And Gore echoed that.
“ I cannot speak, ” said he ; “ but let me see
Those eyes, dear eyes, and kiss them thus, and thus.
Oh ! I could kiss them thus for ever, here
Within my arms, your face upon my heart,
You’ll lie all night, and in the morn you will
Be better, stronger. Dearest, is’t not so ?

See, let me kiss your heart, surely my lips
Will soon revive it's beat." . . .

—"My darling husband,
I live again; beneath those kindest lips
I *do* feel stronger. Hark to my old friends!
They're glad, the winds, that I am better; oh!
Indeed I am; I feel I'm now *so* strong!
Methinks that I could wish to feel again
The dear old winds once more upon my cheek.
Clasped now secure within my world!—your arms."
Just then the casement burst with one strong blast,
Which straight, as if, (its purpose answered), it
Were awed, with gentle breath blew over them.
Within his furred pelisse she twined her arms
Around his thrilling waist, her heart pressed close
Against his heaving, faithful breast. Gore seemed
To lose his very soul upon her lips—she hers.
He felt her twine and cling around him with
A strange unearthly power. He pressed her closer.
A fearful dread burst o'er him!

"Live, my own,"

He wildly cried, "Oh do not leave me now."
Ah, no! with one hand gently reachèd forth
To some invisible clasp, and with a smile
Within those long, long-suffering eyes,
Not health, but a more perfect beauty stole
Slowly and imperceptibly, and softly
Down, down, and over her dear, dear thin face.
She passed away—poor Gore!—she passed away.

* * * * *

Then rose a cry of such soul-tortured anguish,
So fearful that it seemed to tear at Heaven.
It made the peasants start up in their sleep,
And cross themselves, and mutter a short prayer,
And draw their children closer to their breasts.
"My own, my own, my lost, my darling wife!"
For many days Gore was unconscious; they
Could scarce detach her body from his grasp.
He was a shadow when he rose at last—
Long afterwards.

He never smiled again.

IV.

How soft those tapers thro' yon portals burn,
How sweetly sound those voices o'er the snow,
Oh! sweetest strain, that Russian hymn of Death.
Soft! hark! was not that last the hallowed voice
Of angels murmuring, as they floated by?
The wind is all made vocal e'er it fall,
In gentle whisperings thro' yon lonely Pines!



Burial Hymn of Peasant Girls.

Flowers be symbols of the Dead,
The dead but seem to wither;
For like the lilies o'er them laid,
Their dust the angels gather,
And bring it in a golden urn
To her who calls them sister;
And ask her, with a tear, to make
It bloom next dawn of Easter.

And then she straightway hies and gets
A sweet kiss from her son, dear ;
And this she breathes upon the dead,
Who'll rise when Easter dawns here.

For where the flow'ret's heart is laid,
The gentle Earth will shield it,
And after a sweet sleep, in Spring
Fresh coronals will yield it.

Then rest thee maiden, in thy tomb,
Nor think it dark and lowly,
For we will come and see thee oft
'Twixt this and Easter holy.

And praised be He who made the flowers,
The Trinity who'll bless her,
And love be given to Mary Queen,
Whose rosy lips will kiss her.

Burial Hymn of Serfmen and Matrons.

Eve drops her shadows one by one,
Among the hills, and o'er the river ;
Veils all the trees with mantles dun,
And peace seems come for ever !

The shimmering leaflets scarcely stir,
Scarce flows the glassy river ;
The flowers half sleeping, welcome her,
Yes, peace hath come for ever !

Oh ! not for ever, not for aye,
For soon the dawn will shiver,
The rest that slumbers in the sky ;
Peace has not come for ever !

For only when all things, in death
Low on the earth shall quiver ;
When ev'n the flowers shall cease to breathe,
Then peace shall come for ever.

For then the dawn shall scatter peace,
Which, now, the eve hath never ;
Old loves shall meet, old griefs shall cease,
And peace shall reign for ever !



She lies in holy 'Dome,'* bestrewn with roses,
And the poor serfmen come and pray around ;
Fair Russian girls, and matrons meek and simple,
With gentlest symbols, wreaths and crowns, adorn
Her bier. But o'er the sable velvet pall
That hides it from their view, and which they sprinkle
With sacred water, some kind hand hath set
In golden letters, these few solemn words :



" Take her to thee, most Holy Lord.

JESU ! ADONAI ! IMMANUEL ! "†

* * * *

* *Dome*, Russian for "Church."

† These names are not unfrequently used in the Greek Church,
as in the above case.

V.

Some months had passed ; a stranger stood within
The precincts of that church. The Russian priest
Leading his little children by the hand,
Did show the way to a fair marble tablet
Extended on the ground, near a Greek cross ;
He knelt, and made his children kneel, the while
The stranger stood convulsed with sobs.

He read :

MARGARET CONSTANTINOVNA,
21 years,
A beautiful and good English Lady,
Who died in this village,
On her way to join her kindred
At St. Petersbourg,
3rd November, 18—
Take her to thee,
Jesu ! Adonai ! Immanuel !

Long silence followed. When they spoke at last :
“ Sir, Constantinovna means with us the daughter
Of Constantine ; we learnt from her domestics,
Her parents’ name was Constantine, tho’ not
Much like an English name.”

All this was said

In German, which the priest could speak somewhat.
“ As to those words which follow, those three words, Sir,
I will explain. Whilst staying here with us,
Too weak to press her journey, all my children
Were friends to her ; they loved her, Sir, most dearly.
My youngest one she liked to see at play
Upon her bed, when she could not rise up.
One day it crawlèd o’er her breast, still hugging
And kissing her (who dozed). In doing so
It pulled her frill of lace, and showed a scar
Scarce healed, the which my wife called me to note
I saw cut on her skin, with a sharp instrument,
The holy initial, and there was another.
Oh pardon me, Sir ! I did place these words
Above her gentle corpse. She left large sums

In charity to this country. Leave her, Sir,
To rest with us ; Oh ! do not take her from us.
A mausoleum we will raise above her,
That shall protect her dust, as that of kings."

Such monument was built. The children kissed
The stranger's hands, and he departed, weeping.

But he returned ! And one night, when the moon
Was hid in clouds, and the wild winds were up,
Stretched by her tomb, amid the drifting snow,
His heart did rest with hers ! . . . Yea, Heaven *is*
just and kind !







UN-NAMED AND UNCLAIMED.

A LEGEND OF VALSALVA.*



HE knife was in my fingers, the small knife
thin and keen,
My cuffs turned back for labour, with a mind
intent to glean
The secrets of the house of life, by breaking thro' the
seal—
The waxen seal of Death, that hung on limbs that once
could feel.

* Valsalva ; an Anatomist of Bologna, 1666.

The dank dissecting theatre was void, tho' 'twas
not late,
But falling nightward and alone, with death and gloom
I sat.
I raised the knife, the blue-veined skin its blood-
stained edges tear ;
By Heaven—I noted not before—that skin was won-
drous fair !
Fair, say I ? It was passing fair, and the hands were
long and white,
But pale, poor girl, with a yellow tinge that wrung the
gazer's sight.
Her's was the fine cut nostril, which even then seemed
to breathe ;
But there too was the opal-hued opacity of death.
But all my soul was centred in that face of wondrous
mould,
I gazed and gazed upon it till my limbs felt dead and
cold.
And now I've sat me down and call my spirit to mine
eyes,

And in silent contemplation, thus the hurrying day-
light flies.

I take that cold but dimpled arm and press it to my brow,
And smooth her hair with idiot hand on temples veined
with blue.

A toilet for the dead! Oh! let me dream, still dream
awhile;

By Heaven! beneath that wavy curl her face—yes, *it*
did smile!

'Tis but the advancing change of death—the shadow
of his wing—

That flits and flits, and hovers o'er this poor unclaimed
thing.

Yet oh! how beautiful she was; those limbs of tender
mould

Tho' cold and dead, were white and smooth as Venus'
form of old!

Ah me! it is a mournful thing to love what earth hath
claimed;

To hang upon a hollow cheek and eyes by 'death
defamed.'

Oh ! I did call thee oft, and oft with wild and rapturous
breath,

But thou, poor thing, did'st still sleep on thy joyless
sleep of death.

No worldly jeer had hindered me, had I known thee
in the life,

I would have woo'd thee for my bride, and 'worn thee
as my wife.'

I would have raised thee from the dust, and warmed
thee in my heart.

Men might have laughed, but, ah ! they could have
never made us part.

I would have cast me at thy feet, whate'er prim fools
had thought ;

Thy love, and only thine, alas ! my craving soul had sought.

Tho' very base, no baseness could I e'er have shown
to thee ;

Nay, even thy lips, though soiled perhaps, had given
me purity !

All silent. What unearthly chill is creeping o'er my
frame ?

My eyes grow dim, the walls go round like waves of
rolling flame.

A deep love-sickness drains my cup of reason to the lees,
I stagger, heavens! beside the corpse down sink my
trembling knees.

Oh! raise thy lips to mine, dear love, see how my
loving arm

Entwines thy neck, and see, mine eyes with faithful
love are warm.

See love's own fire breathes on my lips, they long their
thirst to slake.

Well — that is well — indeed! I knew that thou
would'st soon awake;

Thus raise thy lips to mine,—oh, dear one! press them
closer still—

Thus let me hang for ever—Fools! Who dare say
they are chill?

Alas! my lips did grow to hers with wild and
phrensied bliss;

And oh! the awful rapture of that most unhallowed kiss!

* * * * *

But that unearthly meeting of the lips was all I
knew ;

Wild gusts of burning flame did seem my brain to
hurtle through.

My temples ceased to beat, the roof seemed crashing
o'er my head,

And slowly creeping up, I felt the coldness of the
dead.

The twilight died around me, all things seemed to sink
away,

But ever on my knees I crouched, and pressed her lips
of clay.

* * * * *

And kneeling still, they found me with my face upon
her cheek,

They only thought th' unhealthy room had made me
faint and weak.

But, ah ! I never may forget my lost and buried love—
Death-love—that still weighs on me, as ONE cypress
glooms a grove !



THE EXILE.*



SOMBRE, with drooping wings an Angel past,
A lofty melancholy on his brow,
And round him garments of the night, that
cast
Majestic shadows o'er the world below.

Within his arms a baby slept, which late
He'd taken from the cradle where it lay;
And then his aspect had been mild and sweet,
As the child dreams of laughter and of play.

* Humbly inscribed to H. W. LONGFELLOW, Esq.

For Azrael, God's own messenger of death,
Can wear a countenance of joy or woe ;
Joy to the true, as heaves their latest breath;
Woe to the base, who struggling, dread to go.

The angel gazed upon two men, but *one*
He fixèd with a steady sorrowing eye ;
The man's soul shook like theirs that weep alone ;
“ He seeketh me,” he cried, “ and I must die.”

“ Yea, let me die,” he said, “ but oh ! not here,
So far from that fair land that nourished me.
Ind, thou art not my country, revelry
Hath seared my heart, I will not die with thee !”

And then his soul yearned back to the sweet village,
The gentle English home of his young years ;
The household hearth-loves, and the image
Of one dear form came shining thro' his tears.

But Azrael waved him on with moveless gaze,

—" But one short year I crave, oh, spare me one !
It may not be ? Then welcome ; I will raise
My spirit to thy level—Angel, on ! "

With loving smile the Angel bent him down,
His awful brow subdued, its grandeur shaded,
He whispered in his ear some words unknown ;
The lips fell, the brow lighted up, then faded
To the cold grey opacity of stone ;
And where two men had been *was only one !*



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